

Stanley, Edward

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LETTERS.

Letter from Augustus A. Gould.

BOSTON, March 29, 1852.

HONORED SIR: I proceed to answer the questions proposed by you as directly as I can, without subjecting myself to be misapprehended.

First. Did Dr. C. T. Jackson, during the months of October and November, 1846, repeatedly claim in your presence the discovery of the anæsthetic properties of sulphuric ether?

Answer. The expression "claim the discovery," I think would scarcely convey the correct idea; but, in numerous conversations with him during the period specified, he at all times averred that he proposed the use of sulphuric ether to Dr. Morton anterior to, and in direct connection with, his first dental operation under its influence.

Second. Whether or not, about the middle of November, Dr. J. made this claim in presence of yourself, W. T. G. Morton, R. H. Eddy and H. J. Bigelow?

Answer. I do not distinctly recollect such a claim being made at the interview alluded to. Dr. J. visited my office at that time in reference to an article which Dr. Bigelow was about to publish, and was much agitated at the time of his entrance. This matter appeared to have been satisfactorily adjusted, and the conversation turned pleasantly on the whole subject of etherization. I remember that Dr. J. told Morton that he sent him to the hospital. Presuming that M. would not admit this, and not wishing to have a fresh outbreak at that time, I made a sign to him not to contend, when he calmly replied, "Well, if you can prove it, it must of course be so." From this it may be inferred that he had made a more general claim, though I do not remember to have heard it.

Third. Whether or not you heard Dr. J., at a meeting of the

Warren Club, at Dr. Warren's house, on Thursday after the 16th of November, 1846, declare to Dr. Warren that Mr. Morton was administering ether under his (Dr. J.'s) directions, and whether or not Dr. J. did request Dr. W. to have the ether tried in a capital operation (amputation), and whether or not Dr. W. objected to Mr. Morton's administering the ether, and requested Dr. J. to administer it himself.

Answer. As to precise dates, I cannot be positive; but I recollect the occasion and the conversation referred to very distinctly. Dr. W. and myself were conversing about the operation he had done at the hospital under the influence of the ether administered by Dr. Morton. I remarked that Dr. Jackson had something to do with the matter (alluding to the employment of ether.) Dr. W. immediately turned to Dr. J., who was near him, and said, "Dr. J., I understand that you know something about the article administered by Mr. Morton," (it had been supposed that some substance was combined with ether.) Dr. J. replied, "Yes, it is sulphuric ether—I told him of it;" and also made some jocose remarks about M.'s employment of it. Dr. W. then said there was to be another operation at the hospital the next day (or next but one,) and asked Dr. J. to come and administer it instead of Mr. M., expressing also some reasons why he should prefer him. Dr. J. replied that he could not, as, in the first place, he should be out of the city; and, secondly, he had yielded to M. the entire right of administering it. This is the true import and spirit of the conversation, though the words used may not be precisely those employed at the time; and this was the manner in which the conversation originated. I did not hear Dr. J. declare that Mr. M. was administering ether under his directions; nor did I hear him request Dr. W. to have it tried in a capital operation; and Dr. W.'s language expressed a preference for Dr. J. rather than an objection to Mr. Morton.

As it is not unlikely that Congress may take some action in favor of the discoverer or discoverers of the anæsthetic properties of ether, and as I have perhaps been as familiar with the sayings and doings of the claimants as any other person, and probably more so, it may not be improper for me to state what seem to me the essential facts in the case.

The following important points will, I think, be very generally if not unanimously admitted by those in this vicinity who have been most familiar with the history of etherization.

1. Dr. Jackson proposed the use of sulphuric ether by inhalation to Dr. Morton.
2. He specified the use of *rectified* ether.
3. He gave directions as to the manner of administering it.
4. He gave assurances of its safety.

As to his convictions of the extent of its efficacy, the responsibility he bore in the first, and more especially the subsequent operations, as to the extent of his agency in recommending its use at the hospital, and many other points, there will be a great difference of opinion.

On the other hand, it will not be disputed that the appearance of W. T. G. Morton at Dr. J.'s office while seeking the means to control a timid patient, gave occasion to Dr. J. to propose ether: that he (Morton) actually put his indication to the test, performed the first experiment and had the sole administration of it in his hand for several weeks, until it was fully admitted into surgery; and that to him, and the surgeons and others co-operating with him, the world is indebted for having the conviction forced upon it, of the safety and efficacy of the process of etherization.

There are many other points claimed by him, as to his knowledge and agency, about which there are differences of opinion.

For a more particular statement of my views I might refer you to a paper which I presume is in the hands of both Jackson and Morton, intended to present the essential facts as they appeared when the controversy was less complicated than it has since become, and to which I supposed both of them might subscribe. It accords, in the essential points, with the summary since deduced by the French Academy from documents submitted to them.

It is truly painful to see a discovery which should have conferred so much glory on those concerned, become, by controversy, a by-word and a reproach. Still, it is the greatest gift to suffering humanity that has ever been conferred—and it belongs to this country. The country ought therefore to claim it as its own great discovery, and to stamp it as such by an act of national recognition and munificence. Certainly it should not be behind other nations, as it now is, in this respect. Both the claimants, in my belief, have been essentially instrumental in its development, and awards to both of them will not be misplaced.

With great respect your obedient servant,

AUGUSTUS A. GOULD.

Hon. W. STANLY.

Letter from John C. Warren.

BOSTON, March 30, 1852.

SIR: I beg leave to acknowledge the reception of your favor of March 23d, desiring me to give "information in regard to the connection of Dr. C. T. Jackson and Mr. W. T. G. Morton with the ether discovery of the anæsthetic effects of sulphuric ether."

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This I shall be happy to do, after premising that, while I recollect the main facts with perfect distinctness, the minor ones may be transposed in my memory as to time and place.

You probably have seen the statement made by me, on the application of a committee of the House of Representatives, of "the first surgical operation under the influence of ether, employed for the prevention of pain;" this operation took place on the 17th or 18th of October, 1846, and was done by me at the request of Dr. Morton, as stated in my reply to the committee. A few days after it was performed, there was a meeting of gentlemen for scientific purposes at my house; among whom were Dr. A. A. Gould, distinguished for his scientific labors, and Dr. C. T. Jackson, whose reputation is well known; the former gentleman and myself were in conversation on the unexpected and marvelous influence exerted by ether in preventing pain, when Dr. Gould said, "here is Dr. Jackson, who knows something of the matter." On hearing this I turned to Dr. Jackson, who was a few steps from us, and asked whether he knew any thing of the article that had been employed, what it was, and whether there was any morphine dissolved in it? Without any appearance of excitement, smiling at the time, he said, "O yes, I told Morton of it, advising him at the same time to be cautious how he used it or he would kill somebody, and recommended to him to secure himself against too great a responsibility by requesting you to perform a surgical operation under its influence." He then told us that he suggested it to Dr. Morton, in consequence of an application from the latter to give him something that should prevent pain in a severe dental operation. From the period of this conversation to the present time, although frequently addressed on the subject by Drs. Jackson, Morton and others, *I have never learned any fact which has led me to doubt that Dr. C. T. Jackson suggested to Dr. Morton the employment of ether as an anæsthetic agent, previous to any dental operation performed by him under its influence.*

As to my requesting Dr. Jackson to go to the hospital for the purpose of administering the anæsthetic agent, I have no distinct recollection on the subject; but I think it highly probable, under the existing circumstances, I did make such a request.

In the month of November following, I attended a meeting composed of gentlemen of education, cultivators of science, which seem to have been assembled by Dr. Jackson, for the purpose of displaying the grounds on which he rested his claim to this discovery in regard to ether; the facts then advanced, confirmed me in the belief I had previously entertained, and, so far as I know, had the same effect upon the minds of all present. In regard to the note written by me to Dr. Jackson, I have no recollection of its contents, although I have reason to believe I did write a note

to him on the subject of ether some time in the month of November.

Thus, sir, I have briefly, although I hope decidedly and clearly, as far as I am able, expressed my belief on the question of the agency of these two gentlemen in the application of ether for the prevention of pain; and I have only to add, that I should no more think of separating the name of Dr. Jackson from the introduction of etherial inhalation, than I should that of Dr. Morton. In order, however, to do equal justice to the latter, the statement which I had the honor to make to the committee of the House of Representatives of the United States, should be taken in connection with this reply to your letter.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
JOHN C. WARREN.

Hon. Mr. STANLY.

Letter from G. M. Dexter.

BOSTON, April 19, 1852.

SIR: I embrace the earliest opportunity to reply to yours of 12th instant.

The Massachusetts General Hospital, as a corporation, have never been called upon and have never intended, to my knowledge, to express any opinion as to the merits of the claim for discovery as between Messrs. Jackson and Morton. The trustees have been desirous to give publicity to its introduction and successful application in the institution they represent.

My private opinion is, that both gentlemen deserve great credit Dr. Jackson for his scientific, and Dr. Morton for his practical services, in giving to the world, under the guidance of Providence, this most inestimable blessing.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,
G. M. DEXTER.

Letter from Thomas Lamb.

BOSTON, April 16, 1852.

SIR: In reply to you questions—

Are you aware that the trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital were authorized by Dr. Jackson to sit as umpires in the controversy as between him and W. T. G. Morton to the discovery of etherization?

My answer is, that I was not.

Did you as one of the trustees of the hospital examine the statements or evidence in behalf of Dr. Jackson's claims to the discovery of etherization, and has he at any time appeared before you personally or by counsel to support his claim?

I did not, and he has not.

Are you aware that any such investigation has been made by the trustees of the hospital as to give a judicial character to their decision in relation to the ether controversy?

I am not.

Have you or not, considered N. I. Bowditch, Esq., alone responsible for so much of the hospital report of 1847 as relates to the ether controversy?

I have considered the committee (N. I. Bowditch and J. W. Edmunds) who collected the materials, drafted, signed and presented that report to the trustees for their acceptance, as responsible for the whole of it. What their division of labor and responsibility was, I am unable to state any more definitely than is conveyed by the report itself, which accompanies this communication from your obedient servant,

THOMAS LAMB.

To EDWARD STANLY, Esq.,
Washington.

Letter from Professor Henry B. Rogers.

BOSTON, April 16, 1852.

DEAR SIR: In relation to the inquiries addressed to me in your communication of the 12th instant, in relation "to the ether controversy now under consideration by a select committee in Congress," I have the honor to make the following statement: That I was one of the trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital in the years 1846-47; that said trustees were not authorized by Dr. Jackson, so far as I know, to sit as umpires in the controversy between him and Dr. Morton, as to the discovery of etherization; that I read the statements and evidence for and against the claims of Dr. Jackson in this matter, so far as the same were contained in the annual hospital report for 1847, or presented by the committee on that subject, and that Dr. Jackson never, at any time, appeared before me personally, or by counsel to support his claims; that I understand the report alluded to above, as expressly disclaiming any judicial character in respect to the investigation made by the committee on the ether controversy, but that I have no reason to doubt that it was as thorough and im-

partial as, under the existing circumstances, it could at the time be made, except through process of law; that N. I. Bowditch, Esq., was the sole author of that part of the report of 1847, which relates to the ether controversy, and originally, with his colleague, assumed the entire responsibility in respect to it; but on its acceptance by the board of trustees, and subsequently by the corporation, that these parties also became responsible as in similar cases. As one of the trustees, in consenting to the vote of acceptance, I relied mainly upon the fidelity and intelligence of their committee, in whom I had great confidence.

I remain, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
HENRY B. ROGERS.

Hon. EDWARD STANLEY, M. C.

Letter from William T. Andrews.

BOSTON, April 19, 1852.

SIR: A short absence from home prevented my answering immediately your letter of the 12th instant.

I resigned my seat at the Board of Trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital before any part of the transactions in regard to the ether controversy took place; consequently I am unable to furnish an answer to any of the questions proposed by you in relation to that matter.

I am, with much respect, your obedient servant,
WILLIAM T. ANDREWS.

Hon. EDWARD STANLY,
House of Representatives, Washington City, D. C.

Letter from Charles Amory.

BOSTON, April 15, 1852.

DEAR SIR: Your esteemed favor of the 12th inst. was received this morning, and I hasten with pleasure to answer as directly as I can, consistently with a fair understanding of the points at issue, your several inquiries.

I am not aware that the trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital, or any committee of the board of trustees, were ever authorized by Dr. C. T. Jackson to sit as umpires in any controversy between himself and any other person; and so long as I was a member of the board, the trustees, as a board, never did so act, nor intend so to do.

I take the liberty of sending you the report of the trustees of the hospital to the corporation, at their annual meeting in January, 1848, which was, as I presume you are aware, drawn up by the chairman of their committee, Mr. N. I. Bowditch. It was read by him, if my memory serves me right, to the trustees prior to the meeting of the corporation, at which time a question was raised whether the institution might not, in some sense, be considered as taking sides in the miserable controversy, then at its height, between Messrs. Jackson and Morton; but as most of the facts stated by the committee were of public notoriety, and as the committee, in introducing the subject, on pages 10 and 11, refer to it simply as a discovery first brought into successful use at our hospital, and in their note, pages 45 and 46, and particularly on page 47, distinctly disavow any judicial power, and as the trustees felt the public were deeply interested in all that had any bearing on the case, they offered the report to the corporation, fully satisfied that the conclusions stated on pages 43 and 44, by the committee, were correct.

I believe I have, from time to time, read all that has been published either by Dr. Jackson or Morton, or any of their friends, on the subject of this ether controversy; but neither of them have ever appeared before me to support their claims, except in the public prints; and there, I regret to say, to my mind, neither appear to advantage.

I have always considered Mr. Bowditch as the author of the *whole* of the report of the trustees in January, 1848, it being usual with us, when appointing the committee on the annual report, to make that gentleman the chairman who was known to be willing to draw up the report.

I have no personal acquaintance with either Dr. Jackson or Morton, but would state that Dr. Jackson was well known to most, if not all the trustees acting with me in 1847 and 1848; and I am sure no disposition was entertained by any one to do him the slightest injustice in consequence of our conclusion as to his claims to the discovery of etherization.

Apologising for occupying so much of your valuable time,

I have the honor to remain,

Your very obedient servant,

CHARLES AMORY.

Hon. EDWARD STANLY,

*Member of the Select Committee on the Ether question
in the House of Representatives, Washington.*

Letter from J. Wiley Edwards.

BOSTON, April 19, 1852.

SIR: Yours of the 12th, requesting answers to several questions therein stated, was duly received.

I answer—1st. That the trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital never undertook to act as umpire between Dr. Jackson and Morton—while treating of a discovery brought to light in the hospital, as part of its history.

2d. I never heard from Dr. Jackson in the matter either by counsel or personally, but the chairman of the committee made up his statements after interviews with Dr. Jackson, and Dr. Gay as his friend.

3d. Nothing of a judicial character was ever contemplated by the trustees, or the committee, in this matter.

4th. I consider Mr. Bowditch solely responsible for the preparation and drafting of the report to trustees. My signing it shows I concurred in it.

Your obedient servant,

J. WILEY EDWARDS.

To Hon. EDWARD STANLY,
Washington, D. C.

Letter from Edward Wigglesworth.

BOSTON, April 16, 1852.

SIR: I shall be happy to give you what information I can, in answer to the inquiries addressed to me as a trustee of the Massachusetts General Hospital.

1. The trustees of the hospital were not authorized by Dr. Jackson to act as umpires in the controversy between him and Dr. Morton. The report of their committee, in which this subject was discussed, was the regular annual report of the state of the institution, presented by the trustees to the corporation. The introduction of ether into surgical practice was naturally dwelt upon at some length, as the most important event belonging to the history of the hospital for the year. The detailed investigation of the controversy between Drs. Jackson and Morton, is to be attributed to the interest felt in the subject by the gentleman who drew up the report.

2. Dr. Jackson never appeared before me personally, nor by counsel, to support his claims, and I never made that sort of examination of the evidence on either side, which would be due from a jury or a historian. I formed my opinion from reading the

pamphlets which appeared when the question of discovery was first agitated, and from conversing with medical men.

3. The trustees cannot be said to have made a judicial investigation of the ether controversy, as it never was referred to them for judgment; but I have no doubt that Mr. Bowditch investigated the evidence with as much care as could be reasonably demanded of a judge.

4. The responsibility of the trustees for the report is only such as arises from their having accepted it; but the acceptance, if I recollect rightly, was unanimous, and was followed shortly after by the contribution of all of them towards the sum of a thousand dollars raised and presented to Dr. Morton as a testimonial of the contributors' sense of his merits in connexion with the discovery and introduction of sulphuric ether as an anæsthetic agent.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

EDWARD WIGGLESWORTH,

Hon. EDWARD STANLY.